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Guns alone will not buy security

By Don Bonker

Several weeks ago we watched from the floor of the House as a determined Jimmy Carter stood before the Congress of the United States to deliver his State of the Union message. His stinging criticism of Russia's invasion of Afghanistan touched a latent jingoistic chord from coast to coast. The demand for American action could be heard throughout the halls of Congress.

We also witnessed a President who seemed to abandon the principles he earlier sought to include in his administration's foreign policy: promotion of human rights, restraint on arms sales, nonproliferation of nuclear materials, checks on CIA covert activity, an all-volunteer military service, and reduction of defense spending.

In the aftermath of Vietnam and Watergate, these were the very objectives that Jimmy Carter promised as a candidate; and, as a President, he and the Congress have worked hard to implement these goals during the first four years. Now the President, with the apparent blessing of the Congress, was promoting something different and disquieting.

What does all this mean? Are we abandoning our humanitarian goals? Is this the death knell of "détente"? Are we possibly reverting back to the "defensive pactomania" of the 1950s — the Dulles-Nixon-Kissinger policies of embracing unsavory dictators only because they spout anticommunist slogans to win our affections?

Few doubt the need to strengthen existing US resolve and commitments in a volatile world, but this requires more than sheer military force or strategic preparedness. US strength is measured by our self-confidence, our maturity as a people, and the insights and actions of our leaders. Carter himself has nurtured this theme in US policy formulation.

European parliamentarians with whom I recently had discussions about human rights expressed the view that American restraint in the Iranian crisis is a much admired sign of our strength as a people. They pointed out that for too long we have been wedded to poli-

cies that committed us to adopting the odious tactics, principles, and policies of our adversaries. Too often we abandoned our own values by pursuing expedient and symbolic actions.

Even though the national dialogue today is dominated by military approaches — establishing military facilities in the Persian Gulf, enlarging our rapid deployment force, establishing a naval presence in the Indian Ocean, the sale of previously banned military equipment to China, and cultivation of security ties with other countries all along Russia's southern border — all of this has its price. It comes at the expense of other values that are equally important in our relations with the world community.

It would be tragic if we have now reached a point where firm promotion of human rights and restraints on nuclear and conventional arms sales are politically anathema. But clearly events in Iran, Ethiopia, Philippines, Zaire, Pakistan, Nicaragua, Cambodia, Chile, Argentina, and Guatemala have shown that human rights concerns are directly related to our genuine, long-term security interest — something that cannot be purchased with guns, airplanes, and the training of torturers. It has never been the lack of weapons but internal discord and insensitivity to human needs that threaten such repressive governments and often our own security interests.

People tend to forget that the United States's uncritical support of regimes like the ex-Shah's, whose main accomplishment is the exploitation of their subjects, has irreparably tarnished our image abroad. As inheritors of a tradition that fosters liberalism, human dignity, and individual rights, we must not blindly return to the bankrupt policies that identify us with such regimes.

The House Subcommittee on International Organizations, which oversees human rights policies, recently held several hearings on human rights conditions in Asia. All the private witnesses testified that wherever and whenever the US supported improvement in human rights activities the situation changed for the better as local governments eased up on harsh policies to accommodate our concerns.

In the final analysis, we promote our long-term interests — including security and strategic interests — when we remain true to ourselves and our vision of humanity by encouraging democratic change and social and economic justice. The recognition of this reality, I believe, will make the eighties the decade of human rights. And, in the long run, it will advance our own best interests.

As President Carter reminded us in his State of the Union address: "In repressive regimes, popular frustrations have no outlet except violence. But when people and their governments can approach their problems together — through open democratic methods — the basis for stability and peace is far more solid and enduring. That is why our support for human rights in other countries is in our national interest as well as part of our national character."

Now more than ever, we must continue our vigorous promotion of human rights, for it would be sad and counterproductive if we emulated Soviet policies and methods in dealing with third-world countries.

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